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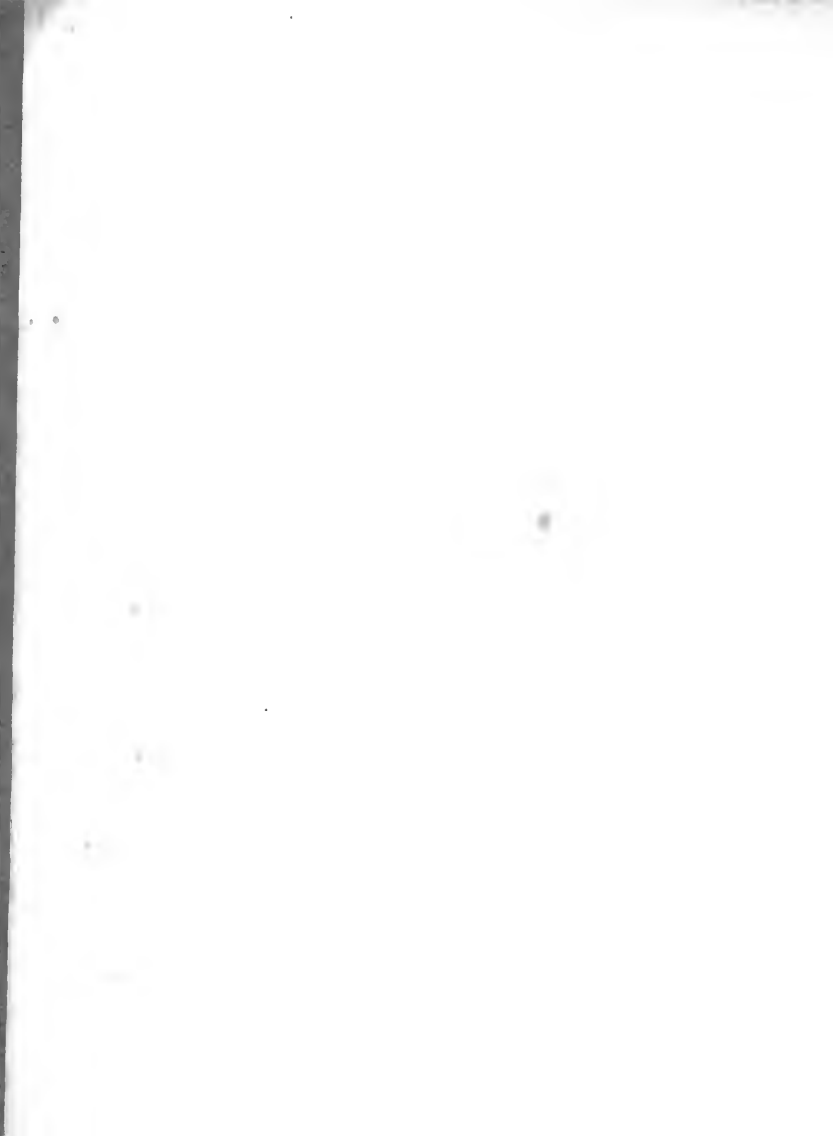
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ome Words on Allegory in
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1895.



For

Ernest Lee Roberts Brown
Alhambra

With the Writer's Good Wishes.

17. IX. 1895

*To the Memory of Henry Nettleship a true lover of
English Letters.*

PRIVATELY PRINTED OPUSCULA

ISSUED TO MEMBERS

OF THE

SETTE OF ODD VOLUMES

No. XXXVIII.

ALLEGORY IN ENGLAND.

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*VERE dicunt sapientes—
Sunt quot homines tot mentes !
Sit res levis sitve gravis,
Vix consentit Par in quâvis.
Pauca sunt de quibus cuncti
Simus in sententia juncti,
Sed de isto Disserente
Omnibus ex nostra gente
Vox est una: gratias damus
Noster quia Ignoramus !
Est (ut non laudetur nimis)
Inter Impares ex primis.*

B. Q.

London, September 25th, 1895.



Some
Words on Allegory in England
read to the Odd Volumes
at their Meeting
July 5 1895

by their Brother IGNORAMUS

and
privately printed
for him by PLATRIER Brothers
at their Printing House at Chlswick in August
1895

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A. C. C. C.

*D*IXIT Frater Ignoramus—
Piscibus copertus hamus
Valde mordax ac mortalis
Est Allegoria talis !
Ast responsit Dramatista
Tu ne crede, frater, ista !
Te decipiunt verba, quia
Non est sic Allegoria ;
Est Matrona pulchra, decens,
Cui origo non est recens,
Cujus lingua bene pendit,
Ac mens omnia comprehendit,
Velata admodum Vestalis,
Est Allegoria talis !
Causam, fratres, judicate
Et victori plausum date.



SOME WORDS ON ALLEGORY IN ENGLAND.

A LLEGORY has long been with us, it forms part of our speech and part of our thoughts, its power for good and evil has been manifest often enough in human history, it is difficult indeed to keep clear of its influence, even where it is possible to do so, and we are reduced to the use of symbols if we would escape the magic of what is itself but a symbolisation.

In a famous passage, which I shall here English, of his best known epistle, that to Can Grande, introducing his great Poem, Dante sets forth the

meaning of the term Allegory as he understood it, "And according to the testimony to be spoken it must be understood that of this work there is not merely one single meaning *or* significance, but rather, it should be called *polyseme*, that is, of many meanings, for there is one significance of the letter and another significance of the meaning of the letter; and the first is called *literal*, but the second *allegoric* or *mystic*. Which kind of process that it may be the better set forth, may be considered with regard to this verse. *When Israel went out of Egypt and the house of Israel from among a strange people, Judah became his holiness and Israel his power.* For if we look at the *letter* alone, there is set forth the coming up out of Egypt of the sons of Israel in the days of Moses; if into the *Allegory*, there is set forth to us our Redemption, through Christ. If into the *moral or ethical* meaning, there is set forth to us the conversion of the Soul from the struggle and wretchedness of sin to a state of grace. If into the *anagogic* sense, there is set forth the issue of the holy Soul from the slavery of this Corruption, into the freedom of Glory Everlasting; and though these mystic senses be called by divers

names they may all be called generally *allegoric*, for *allegory* is called from the Greek *alleon*, which in Latin is called *aliene* or *diverse*."

This is plain enough, and I would define Allegory for my purposes as a *literary representation of qualities by beings and objects*; an algebra, as it were, of the mind, used by thinkers and poets to set forth more vividly and passionately their imaginings and conclusions.

ENGLAND in especial has had many famous allegorists, Long Will of Langland, good Master Robert Henryson, Edmond Spenser, John Bunyan, Jonathan Swift, and there are modern masters of the art allegoric, whose names will readily recur to every reader.

The flowers are ours and the fruit, but the seed was fetched from over the sea. The *Romance of the Rose*, a grave, pretty rhyme of love, left unfinished by William of Lorris, to receive after a long interval a marvellous and encyclopædic completion by John Clopinel of Meun, most weighty, most cynical, and most humorous of mediæval ethical teachers: the *Pilgrimage* of Deguileville,

the best known example of a type of allegory that has gone far since his day: above all the noblest book the Middle Ages have left us, vast and lofty as a great gothic cathedral, as elaborate in detail and as holy in purpose,—the *Divine Comedy*, portraying the progress of the Human Spirit towards the Divine—such were the models in the hands of our fourteenth and fifteenth century writers. The makers of the models themselves, French and Italian alike, had devised their beautiful creations after the fashion of the heathen Roman's *Dream of Scipio*, of the *Consolation of Wisdom* (which our Alfred Englished) by the wise and much-enduring Boece, and of the fantastic *Marriage of Philology* by Marcianus (Saxo's master in style).

These and besides these, that curious series of symbolic Christian *Visions*, Adamnan's, Fursey's, Tungdal's, which Bede and later hagiographers have preserved for us,—wild horrors of the brain and heart, sprung from the vast Oriental imaginations of fasting seers and prophets, grafted on yet older and more primitive theories and crude myths of heathen magicians and medicine-men—all these lie at the stem of our famous English allegories.

But beyond these too, far back as literature exists at all, ay, as far as words and sentences have sound, the roots of Allegory stretch into the primeval darkness that broods over our human beginnings.

WE cannot win back so far to-night, we must be content to begin with Langland, a name as unknown five-and-twenty years ago as it was well known five centuries earlier. An earnest, sorrowful personage, that had learnt his wisdom in the hard school of the world, as well as out of crabbed vellums, with the Malvern Hills for his Ecclefechan and the busy, squalid, slimy hithe by Thames Street for the orderly peace of Cheyne Walk; the Carlyle of his time, and with no less influence; scornful, pitiful, hopeful, though few stars pierced the black night through which he was steering. With less impatience than tormented "true Thomas" and none of that childish make-believe that seems to be a part of Tolstoi's nature, Langland perceived, long before the famous Scot or notorious Russian, that the faithful, simple hard-working Piers Plowman, peasant or fisherman, taught of earth and sea, comes perhaps

nearer the apostolic life preached and practised in Galilee than any other we know.

This poor, proud, lean long-legged clerk, stalking silent and self-absorbed to his chantry, along the merry, noisy, dirty, bright-coloured, stinking East-cheap of Richard II.'s day was indeed the wisest man then alive in England. One cannot forget his bold Apologue of the rats that would bell the cat; his keen etching of the sluggish, servile Parliament "that dreaded Dukes and forsook Do-Well"; his miniatures of Lady Meed and her supporters in Church and State; his Hogarthian picture of the seven Deadly Sins portrayed as seven English types of his day:—the tavern braggart, Pride; the meagre backbiting merchant, Envy; the mischievous convent cook, Ire; the drunken village whoremonger, Lechery; the ragged tradesmen, Avarice; the ale-house sot, Glutton, who when he set out for home at night "could neither step nor stand till he had a staff and then he began to go like a gleeman's bitch sometimes aside sometimes arear, as a man that is laying lines to catch larks"; and last and least, the idle, gossiping, ungrateful, poaching priest,

Sloth. Nor of less interest is his clear chart of the pilgrim's Path to Truth through Meekness to Conscience across the brook of Natural Piety, by the side of Swear-not to the croft of Covet-not, past the stocks Steal-not and Slay-not on the left to the park of Lie-not, where, in the field of Say-sooth there stands the manor house of Truth himself, its Moat of Mercy, its walls of Wisdom, its embrasures of Baptism, its buttresses of Belief, its roofing of Love and Loyal Speech, its bars of Brotherhood, its bridge of Prayer, its doorposts of Penance, its hinges of Almsdeeds, where the porter is Grace and seven sisters keep the posterns,—Abstinence, Humility, Charity, Chastity, Patience, Peace, and Largesse.

And as William has his Pilgrim's Progress, so he has his Holy War. My Lady Soul lives in Fleishy Castle, guarded by the castellan Conscience and his sons the Five Senses, assailed at all points by the Evil Ones, Pride and his mighty Meiny, and holpen of the whole host of Heaven. The burning questions of his time, Free-Will, Poverty, the possible Salvation of heretics and heathen, the Right Life, and the coming Reform of the

Church, William debates in long tangled rambling "visions," always with power and often with poetical force, in that rough, tumbling metre that the mass of Englishmen, in spite of Chaucer's fine new-fangled French measures, long continued to prefer to any other.

LET us turn from the misty midland hills and the foggy banks of the London river to the wild shaws and desert heaths of the North to seek the Abbey schoolmaster of Dunfermline, with his delicate and humorous anticipation of that greatest of fabulists, La Fontaine, his exquisite paraphrase of Adam's French pastoral, and for us, above all, the dainty little poem that describes the mystic raiment of the Ideal Woman, and that strong and concise allegory, the *Bluidy Sark*, surpassing even Southwell in its plain pathos as it tells of the True Knight that for our sakes (as a contemporary allegorist put it) "jousted at Jerusalem" with "Death the Joyless" and won the victory through great tribulation. Well may Dunbar have regretted such a singer and thinker as Robert Henryson.

LEAVING learned Douglas and courtly Lindsay unnoticed now, and passing South again, we omit those worthy Tudor practitioners of the Mystery of Similitudes, gallant outspoken George Gascoigne and simple Stephen Hawes (as we must neglect even the Fletchers, whose mastership Milton was to acknowledge, and that Welsh Dante, Ellis Wyn, to whose wierd power George Borrow eagerly testified) and come at once to Spenser. Never was allegory more minutely worked out than in that glorious and typical Elizabethan fragment, the *Faery Queene*. The theme is worthy,—the construction of a Perfect Character, the ideal of highest Humanity, with materials drawn alike from Plato and St. Augustine; and it is decked with all the jewelled splendour the Renaissance could offer, enriched out of the solid wealth of the re-opened classic mines, adorned with great store of the naïve and romantic broidery of the Middle Ages; while always double, sometimes triple, the red thread of allegory runs through the gorgeous fabric, and the whole design is wrought upon the ever-varied, ever-graceful, if over-elaborate pattern of the

stanza its author especially devised for his immortal work. Spenser's art must astonish every one that has served apprenticeship, however brief, to the poet's craft, his Mantegnan processions, his Botticellian idylls, his Dürer-like grotesques, his wild landscapes recalling those of the old Lombard line-engravers, his huge personifications, such as Michael Angelo himself has scarcely surpassed, and yet, with this astonishing variety, the poet still keeps within the bounds of that particular Italian epic style he learnt from Ariosto, and for the first and only time naturalised in England. The palace of Spenser was, like other less lasting but bulkier buildings of the Renaissance time, never finished; but what remains is perfect in itself, the full plan can be seen, the proportions realised, only the details of the unbuilt wing are to seek. The *ethical*, *political*, and *religious* allegory can be traced by the patient and affectionate student beneath the plain story that in itself yields sufficient pleasure to prevent hundreds of readers from diving deeper into this fair-flowing stream of English poetry.

The adventures of the Red Cross Knight and

Prince Arthur, Britomart and Una, Guion and Artegal, Scudamour and Hellanore, the encounters with the false Duessa, and the wicked magician, with cruel, cowardly, braggart pagan knights, and strange and terrific monsters of sea and land, are interesting in themselves; and it is not until one reads the poet's preface with the attention it merits that one feels there is more to be got from his poem than the story that delights. The greatest allegories have always drawn to them scores of pleasure-hunters for one profit-seeker. Even Dante and Milton, who would fain have justified God to man, will be read, when their philosophy shall be acknowledged as infantile as their science, by thousands whom their poetry must stir to finer issues through those outward and visible signs, which, after all, are every whit as spiritual as the inward grace.

Spenser may be denied a statue as, to our shame, Cromwell was, by those that mislike his patriotism, or loathe his views, political or religious, but as a master of allegory, as the Christian next after Dante, who has most effectively presented the symbolic and real together, as the most exact

exponent of the ethic theory of his day, and, certainly, as the greatest of English Platonists he must ever claim our gratitude and respect.

IT is far from Spenser's strong but ill-omened tower in Ireland, far from the rich arras-clad banquetting halls of the peerless Gloriana, where Sidney sung and Shakespeare acted, to the dark noisome jail, where the simple but sore distracted spirit of the humble Bedfordshire tinker was able to bring forth from its deep treasury things new and old. The *Pilgrim's Progress* has passed through the whole world like Robinson Crusoe or Gulliver's Travels, and is one of that dozen of English classics that are almost as well known in Paris and Moscow as they are in London or New York. The Damascus watchman used the book as a touchstone of his fellows' worth, and who loved the Pilgrim was to him a true man. Founded on an old *motif*, crammed with Scriptural citations, filled with reminiscences of Foxe's Martyrs, the book is above all others fresh, personal, and novel. One is attracted at the very outstart by the natural beauty of the style, which is throughout homely,

pithy, and quaint as Sancho's at his best, and noble, unworldly, and dutiful as his master's. Who but relishes the earnest doggrel? Who has not felt the power of those apt parables, the Soul that took the Kingdom of Heaven by violence; the contrasted pair of children, Passion and Patience; the robin and the spider; the Man with the muck-rake? We have all longed for those fleeting glimpses from the Shepherds' outlook on the mountain Delectable of the fair golden City towering above the cold black River. We remember the Temptation, Trial, and Martyrdom in Vanity Fair. We have shuddered at the doubtful combat with Apollyon; at the grim horrors of the pit, of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, of the By-way to Hell. We have felt the haunting fear of Doubting Castle, and of that dim glen beside it where the blind are left to stumble among the tombs. We have followed Christian through the Slough of Despond and up the hill Difficulty. And then the characters, everlasting types, but as human as Dickens or Defoe could have made them—the fearfulness of Faint-Heart; the sturdy courage of Greatheart, and Faithful, of Mr. Steadfast

and Old Honesty, in whom the King's Champion delighted, *for he loved one greatly that he found to be a man of his hands and valiant for the Truth*; the brave matronly tenderness of Christiana; the serene Quakerlike charm of gentle Mercy; the carnal smiles of Madam Bubble, the wiles of Lady Wanton and her kindred; the vanity of the "very pretty man" Mr. Talkative of Prating Row; the easy confidence of Demas and Ignorance; the cozenage of Mr. By-ends and his followers; the rancour of that haughty Jeffreys, My Lord Hategood, and the servile malice of his jury; the comfortable presence of the Shining Ones and the pitiless perseverance of the Prince of Evil—a gallery of portraits we all have learnt to know.

There are those who would scarce scruple to place the Puritan preacher's Iliad, the *Holy War*, as high as his Odyssey, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and there is something to be said for it, even if we must firmly decline to elevate his realistic Mr. Badman to a front place among English allegories. The scenes in and round Mansoul (drawn from Bunyan's own experience of civic strife) are notable indeed, the beleaguered town, the siege, the

sallies, the relief, the judgment of the victor on the traitors, the secret councils of spies and enemies, the reconciliation of the Lord of the city with the repentant citizens ; and they make up a piece of work comparable even to Milton's two epics for the contrast of bitter and base malignity set over against most patient justice and profoundest mercy. The very muster-roll of the army of fiends marshalled for the great assault is full of that simple matter-of-fact horror dear to all of us and ever immensely impressive to the natural British mind.

IT were too long to attempt to exhaust the broad realms of English allegory, but for a last stage we may halt a moment to survey the fertile but storm-scarred domain of Jonathan Swift. If his *Gulliver* be beyond our scope to-night, we may at least consider his *Tale of a Tub*, a most pregnant apologue, which cost its author a bishopric it had richly earned him and gave to English letters one of our notable prose-writers, William Cobbett. Still green beneath the summer-sky, uncumbered as yet by encroaching bricks and mortar, stretches beside Thames that broad meadow where

in the early morning, the poor country boy threw himself down in the grass to read the tiny book, whose satiric spell woke the fire of genius in him, for he too was born to bear witness in his own wayward fashion against the wrongs and follies of the world, as the Dean had done before him. Swift united Voltaire's fine skill of wit, with the clear, sharp, stinging ironic force of Pascal, and the rich idiomatic expression of Quevedo. Rascality and folly show in their worst aspects under the white heat of his compressed fury. The tragedy of his own life fitted him for the rôle he played; there was a depth of pity and sympathy in the lonely-hearted man, and this pity and sympathy only made the world, as he scanned it, the more terrible to his eyes. We know his achievements. If the *love of love* seems sometimes to have been denied him, Swift was indeed, *dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn*. His satirical allegory is a piercing sermon on the pitiful squabbles and the ignorant intolerance that divided and still divide Christendom, and he bore so hard on the ugly malice and vulgar pride of the contending factions, that as in the case of Defoe's famous pamphlet, those who

loved to believe that the filthy parasites, the dead leaves and rotten fruit were essential parts of the living tree were bitterly offended, and took care to revenge themselves in their own scurvy way.

AND here I would fain have spoken of one more book, that most original, most philosophic, and most searching of modern allegories, Robert Louis Stevenson's masterpiece, as I hold, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, but it is well to pause, not for lack of subject matter, but for the sake of them that have sat at meat with us.

LAST question intrudes itself:—"Why have we English so excelled in this branch of Art?" It were probably hard fully to answer. We are reticent. We exaggerate by understatement, we like to set forth our case without seeming to attack our adversary, to indulge in imagination without it being flatly forced upon us that we are departing from the strictly practical. We dearly love *literature with a purpose* and we have tried to write it so often that we have sometimes succeeded

gloriously in spite of the absurd difficulty of the enterprise. The form in fact suits us, hence our excellence therein.

TO-NIGHT, you have allowed me to lead your thoughts swiftly along a path that passed from the secular pines of Ravenna, through the pleached arbours of the old French Rose-garden, over quiet English hills and rough Scottish moors, till we lingered among the hazel coppices of Bedfordshire, and stood for a moment in the old Deanery at Dublin. The guide may have been a worse Cicerone than you looked for, but he has surely not erred in trying for a short space to recall memories of happy hours spent spell-bound at the feet of the veiled dream-lady Allegory.



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